Introduction

LS Productions was founded in 2006 by Scottish entrepreneur, Marie Owen, who wanted to put Scotland on the map as the ‘go-to’ country for campaign shoots, competing alongside other global production hotspots, such as Iceland, Sweden and South Africa. Since its launch, LS Productions has become the UK’s largest stills and motion service production company with offices in Edinburgh, London, New York and Manchester. Its team is made up of 16 full-time in-house producers, production coordinators, production assistants, location managers and a marketing and business development team.

The company prides itself on being a ‘one-stop-shop’ for UK and international production companies, directors, advertising companies, high-end brands and other creatives, taking care of everything from budgeting to location scouting to casting and accommodation. Bucking the trend of keeping locations and service production separate entities, LS Productions has merged the two services, helping to make pitching more effective and shooting as smooth as possible. LS Productions is the only UK-based service production company outside London to have a location library of its size, with over 160,000 location images covering the length and breadth of the UK and featuring some of the country’s most remote, iconic and beautiful locations.

Leadership, strategy and support

How can the industry successfully implement the recommendations outlined in the Screen Sector Leadership Group report?

LS Productions can only echo multiple other responses to the call for evidence, in order to foster an industry in Scotland that is able to compete, if not surpass, other areas of the UK, three crucial areas must be addressed:

- Investment in world class facilities, including purpose-built and adapted studio space (multiple spaces are needed in-order to produce a creative hub);
- Investment and incentives for Productions using local crew to make productions with a commitment to telling stories with a global appeal;
- Funding for training of crew in all departments.

It is time to take urgent action. It is clear other areas of the UK have made great progress in the filming industry, becoming superior hubs for Production. Scotland frustratingly continues to make little progress by continually debating the best way to move forward.

If we look at the model areas such as those adopted by Northern Ireland or Manchester, whether achieved with private or state funding, we can see that they are extremely successful in attracting large scale and high end film and TV. Whilst other...
areas make the process look seemingly simple, we continue to convolute the situation with little sense of urgency.

We also agree with the response from The Association of Film and Television Practitioners Scotland when we state that a Screen Unit needs to represent the breadth of the industry. As a company that predominantly work on commercial production we are aware that film, TV and commercial all feed into each other. Skilled crew, equipment and requirements for facilities are identical across each industry. The industries combine to provide work for freelancers, keep facilities and kit hire companies busy and bring exposure and tourism to locations. Our work is also not seasonal and we produce commercials throughout the year, contributing to the long term, sustainability of the industry in Scotland. It is our belief that the Screen Unit should also take the commercial industry into account as part of its remit.

We want the message to be clear; Scotland is proactive at seeking production, receptive to the needs of all forms of production in an ever-evolving industry and more than equipped to deal with them.

Scotland is open for business.

**What is your view of the current leadership of the screen sector through Creative Scotland and other supporting bodies?**

At present, we find leadership to be fragmented and convoluted. There is little clarity or accountability, with the industry feeling quite rudderless at times.

Whilst our aim is not to criticise or belittle any achievement of Creative Scotland or any other supporting bodies, the absence of a proactive, committed organisation driving the creation of facilities and studio space forward is felt. A combination of private and state funded spaces are needed; purpose-built or adapted studio space. The Film Studio Delivery group should be committed to building the infrastructure greatly needed in Scotland across multiple sites, not just Wardpark, which is unavailable for other incoming productions at this time.

**How can we ensure that the Screen Unit has the remit and responsibility for providing the strategic vision and leadership across the sector? What changes to the current arrangements are necessary to achieve this?**

We need a unit that is visible to us, engages with us, acknowledges our work and promotes the wonderful offerings we have in Scotland on a global stage.

Clarity concerning the remit of the Screen Unit is essential and they should have an over-arching view of, and ultimate responsibility for, funding, training and facilities available from any governing bodies or organisations (public or private.) It is only when these elements develop in a united way that progress can be made.

**How might Brexit impact the Scottish screen industry?**

Initially, the drop in the pound meant we were cheaper for clients as opposed to the countries we frequently compete with; Iceland, Ireland and multiple Scandinavian and Eastern European Countries.
We are aware that leaving the EU will have an impact for the industry across the UK in the long term, a situation that will no doubt become clearer in time.

To us, this highlights the importance of getting Scotland ahead of the game now and of establishing the country as a receptive hub for production as soon as possible, bolstering tax incentives, training and facilities.

LS Productions will continue to build on existing relationships and forge new relationships with international companies and brands and welcome them to Scotland whether we are part of the EU or not.

**How can Scotland become a key destination for UK and international productions?**

LS Productions is fortunate to be able to attend trade shows across the world. Not only do we find this useful for networking but it also affords the opportunity to look at the offering of other countries, from tax incentives to facilities. Whilst the beauty and history of Scotland cannot be denied, and some productions will always have a need to be shot here (in part), the fact that Scotland is lagging not only behind other parts of the UK but also other countries in Europe is undeniable. Many countries have stepped up to the plate in offering multiple purpose-built studios, incentives for using local crew, training programmes for specific roles within the industry and an investment and commitment into attracting high-end film and TV Drama. This in turn has a vast impact on the commercial industry, with all skills, facilities and equipment filtering down to make each country an appealing option for all forms of production. Too many times have we lost commercials to other countries because we lack a high-end, modern and purpose-built studio space to house larger productions.

All bodies and companies need to be led by an over-arching organisation and a Scottish Government that supports our industry with funding, training schemes and the provision of multiple studio spaces.

Once the current issues the industry in Scotland faces have been resolved and we have viable studio space, we need to create noise about the incentives, crew, facilities, facility companies and locations that Scotland has to offer. We need to promote our wonderful industry with its cutting edge facilities across the world, encouraging all who see how incredible Scotland is to shoot their next project here.

**Why have film and TV producers selected Scotland in the past as a location for production?**

In the film and TV industry it seems that production’s will either shoot in part here but not base themselves here - as currently there are no available studio facilities - or it is a story that is inherently Scottish and is required to be told on a Scottish stage.

Based on our personal experience, the following reasons apply to us:

- The story or product is inherently Scottish, i.e whisky;
- The locations or period of architecture required;
- The project is being shot in London but there are some essential scenes that feature a location unique to Scotland that they can’t shoot anywhere else. They will complete part of the shoot here only;
- Diverse, European feeling cities in both Edinburgh and Glasgow;
- It feels seemingly easier to film here in terms of permits;
- Scotland has more hours of daylight than some other Northern European countries in the Winter and exceptional hours of daylight in the Summer;
- The nature on offer;
- To double as other countries that may seem too expensive or with areas that are too inaccessible for some productions.

**What is your view on the current network of regional film offices across the country?**

For LS Productions, the current network of regional film offices are invaluable. We find their support a vital service and would only encourage any further funding and support they require from local councils or government to be given. Whether it’s introducing us to new locations, specific contacts within the council e.g roads department or emergency services they are a wealth of local knowledge which will be essential as the industry here grows.

**Talent Development, Skills and Training**

*How can Scotland nurture and retain domestic talent?*

LS Productions are concerned by the lack of training for specific roles within the industry. It is important to stop teaching our students general media studies and time to teach them how to be a Sound Recordist, a Grip, a Runner, a Location Manager etc. It is then important to fund on the job training in specific departments, with a specific career progression.

The key then is to create a booming industry here, consisting of film, TV, factual, commercial and stills work, so that there is enough work here for people to live in Scotland and make a comfortable living. Too often we hear of crew moving to other parts of the UK as work is more regular and the standard of production is higher. So many crew state that they would move back if there was more work coming into the industry here.

*How might the new Screen Unit work across agencies to ensure a coherent approach to the development of talent?*

The Screen Unit should be ultimately responsible for overseeing and driving all training schemes for specific departments within the industry, setting key targets for training and placements.

*Are there skills deficiencies or gaps which might impede productions choosing to come to Scotland? Does Scotland have the requisite level of domestic talent to accommodate an increase in productions coming to the country?*

As discussed, skilled crew often move to other areas of the UK as there is not enough work in Scotland at present. We are often required to travel crew up from London or Manchester.
In the Commercial sector we often need to look to the rest of the UK for crew, for three reasons:

- Availability
- Training
- Experience

What infrastructure, support and investment is required to ensure continuing development of talent in Scotland? How do we address the problem of inconsistent work for employees in the Scottish screen sector?

The three key areas of training, funding and facilities need to grow and flourish together, if one element falters then progress cannot be made. If we get all three elements right then as the level of production increases, experienced crew members that have perhaps moved from Scotland to elsewhere in the UK will move back for work. Freelancers working across film, TV and commercials will see the volume of work increase and there will be a need to bring new people up through departments to fill gaps. If tailored and targeted training schemes are offered then new entrants will have the skill level required. Once we have created hubs for production with a reputation for skilled crew and world class facilities as well as a track record for welcoming high-end incoming production then the problem of inconsistent work will have been well and truly addressed.

Are there ways in which film and TV productions can be encouraged to utilise Scottish cast and crew where appropriate?

We need to simultaneously train new entrants for specific roles and departments within the industry to a high skill level and incentivise the use of local crew.

Infrastructure, Intelligence and Maximising Benefit to Scotland

What improvements to the current studio infrastructure are needed? How might this be achieved?

LS Productions will begin by saying that we fully support the Pentlands Studio Group in their plans to build a world-class studio complex available for all facets of the industry. We also recognise that there must be more than one studio and that a combination of multiple purpose-built and well refurbished adapted studio space is required to ensure Scotland is a contender in the world of high-end production.

The other evidence we have read shares our sense of inaction over facilities available in Scotland. Whilst we have all been discussing the root of our current problem and holding enquiries into the current state of affairs, other areas have upped their game. Belfast Harbour and Titanic studios have both been through a period of expansion since our enquiries began. The industry in Wales, Northern Ireland and Manchester have all transformed whilst the Film Studio Investment Group have announced funding for one existing studio, Wardpark, a studio that is not currently open for business for any production apart from Outlander.
We would also like to highlight that the Creative Scotland Build Space PDF is out of date and features locations that are no longer available. Some locations are also embarrassingly unequipped for large scale productions and require too much investment to make them appealing propositions. We need a combination of purpose-built, high-tech studios, adapted space refurbished to a high standard with production offices (for a production to be able to walk straight into) and adapted spaces that require investment. Options of varied flexible and versatile spaces are key.

We have been campaigning for sound stages in Scotland for many years. For us, the absence of studio space in Scotland is not, as some might have it, evidence of a strong Scottish tradition to make low-budget arthouse films. The production industry – both film and TV – is too small to lay claim to any tradition. The lack of infrastructure is an embarrassment. It is remains tangible evidence that Scotland has continually failed to nurture and support its small but dedicated film industry, to the extent that many professional freelance crew are forced to work outside the country. It also speaks volumes that often in-order to gain any experience of a sizeable production, crew must work outside Scotland. There are very few productions, with the exception of Outlander, providing regular work and opportunities for career development. The benefits of professional sound stages are diverse and multifarious. A professional studio ensures that production companies will base themselves in Scotland and stay for months, rather than a matter of a few days on location. The competitive tax incentive around the world show how other areas have realised how much they can benefit from welcoming productions. In order that Scotland can benefit from the UK tax break, we need to be able to attract more than the current figure of less than 3% of the total production activity in the UK. In-order to do this, we must be able to house productions in Scotland. For a country with two serious geographical disadvantages – the unreliable weather and the very short Winter daylight hours – Scotland’s lack of a dedicated studio complex reduces the options for any Producer trying to reduce potential costs and risks.

**What kinds of facilities are needed and where?**

The centre of any creative hub is inevitably a studio. We need multiple hubs with the necessary infrastructure to support varying levels of production. This includes multiple studio spaces, production offices, facility companies and kit houses.

There should be choice for an incoming production about where they base in the Central Belt, dependant on their requirements. They should be offered a choice of where to base that will then open up a specific area of locations to them.

Though for practicality reasons the Central Belt is a main focus of production, the requirement to shoot in the Highlands and Islands cannot be ignored. This is due to the fact that locations on offer here are integral to some production’s reasoning for shooting on Scotland. In particular, the Unit should look at ways of facilitating large scale productions on Skye whilst working with local communities and addressing their concerns.
How might these kinds of facilities be funded?

Funding should be received from private and public organisations. Private and state funded studios will both have a place in building the industry here.

The model by which council or government acquire buildings or land to build has worked incredibly well in Manchester and we see no reason why this could not prove to be successful in Scotland.

The Screen Unit needs to be responsible for pushing both private and public funded facilities forward and encouraging the creation of as many studio spaces as possible whilst also lining up incoming productions to fill said spaces.

How might the public and private sector collaborate to ensure a sustainable approach to the development of such facilities?

As above, we see this as less of a collaboration and more about multiple ventures, with a view to creating options and keeping Scotland as busy as possible. The Screen Unit needs to oversee this and ensure it’s progression. As mentioned previously, facilities, training and funding all need to grow simultaneously and it should be the Screen Unit driving all of these elements forward with a sense of both passion and urgency.

How can we ensure the productions leave a positive legacy after filming?

- We would encourage the Screen Unit to fund schemes to train up world-class crew, offer incentives to incoming productions to use this crew and have training programmes on each production to foster new talent for future productions;
- Assist with funding to adapt buildings into viable studio space which is then available for future productions;
- Work closely with local film offices, local communities and land owners to build positive relationships across Scotland;
- Reputation is key and we need to offer a positive, high-end yet cost effective experience to incoming Productions to ensure that Scotland is the number one choice for returning and new productions.